

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

1. FIRST RECORD OF THE SLENDER LORIS *LORIS LYDEKKERIANUS* CABRERA 1908, IN CHENNAI CITY, TAMIL NADU, INDIATARA GANDHI¹, SAI ARCHANA PARA^{2,3} AND AMRITA SIVAKUMAR^{2,4}¹A1 Uttaravedi, 7 Second Seaward Road, Valmiki Nagar, Chennai 600 041, Tamil Nadu, India. Email: tara_gandhi@yahoo.com²Kalakshtra Foundation, Tiruvanmiyur, Chennai 600 041, Tamil Nadu, India.³Email: saiarchie@gmail.com⁴Email: riya2009kshetra@gmail.com

Slender Loris was sighted on February 19, 2010, in the campus of an educational institution located in a busy residential area in south-east coastal Chennai. It was first observed and photographed by two of us (Sai Archana and Amrita) who are full-time students. We noticed it for its strange and endearing appearance, but were unable to identify it or realize its significance. After studying the photographs of February 19, 2010, and making actual observations for a few days, Tara Gandhi identified it as the Slender Loris. The identification was further authenticated and confirmed by wildlife experts. We wish to report our sighting as the first record of the species within an urban environment in Chennai.

The Sighting

Our first sighting was in a clump of low thorny trees overgrown with creepers in a secluded area of the campus where we were trying to photograph an owl at about 17:00 hrs in the evening. Archana notes, "We saw a pale greyish bundle in the tree. On first glance, I thought it to be the owl; Amrita thought it was a bat. After a series of guesses we had settled on a small monkey. As we looked at it, the bundle began to separate and we realized that the creature was not one, but two! They stared at us with their large, round, marble-like eyes with dark markings surrounding them, and we at them. They slowly began ascending the branches of the canopy, always keeping a steady gaze on us. We lost track of one of them, but although clearly increasing the distance between us, the other one still maintained eye contact. The higher it went, the more difficult it became to distinguish it from the dead leaves of the branches."

Subsequently, over the next few weeks (February 20-March 15, 2010), we made several more observations at the same site as well as at other spots in the campus, and we counted four individual animals, including one infant clinging to its mother's underbelly. Sometimes they would be curled up in a bundle, either separately, or two or more together, and at other times we saw them moving slowly along the thin branches of trees. As there were two distinct

spots more than 200 m apart where the lorises were seen repeatedly, we were unsure as to whether there were two separate groups or whether they were the same individuals who had moved from one place to the other. We took several more photographs on these occasions. All the photographs were taken with a small amateur camera with a limited zoom lens. The flash was used only when the lorises were seen in shady recesses.

Status of the Species

The Slender Loris *Loris lydekkerianus* belongs to a group of lesser-known arboreal primates characterised by small body with long slender limbs and no tail, rounded head with short sharp muzzle, large round eyes, insectivorous diet and generally solitary, nocturnal lifestyle. Sexes are alike though males are slightly larger. There are only two strepsirrhine primate genera found in India, *Loris* and *Nycticebus*. The Slow Loris (*Nycticebus*) occurs in north-east India and parts of South-east Asia, and the Slender loris (*Loris*) is found in southern India, south of the Tapti and Godavari rivers up to 800 m, and in Sri Lanka (Menon 2003). The general habitat of the Slender Loris is open scrub jungle, dry deciduous and evergreen forests, but there are records of the species occurring in human-dominated landscapes like plantations or other cultivations and even in the greener parts of some urban and rural areas.

To quote Radhakrishna (2004), "The slender loris is called *kadupapa* in Kannada, which quite literally translates as 'forest baby'. In Tamil, it is called *thevangu*. According to popular folklore, various body parts of the slender loris, most particularly its eyes, impart strength when consumed and potions made out of boiling its flesh and organs are recommended to cure ailments. Hunted for use in folk medicine, killed due to superstitious beliefs about the ill-luck it brings, trapped for laboratory dissections, and driven out of its natural habitat by forest fragmentation, the slender loris is being driven towards gradual extinction. Only pocket populations of the species survive today in scrubland, forest patches and orchards in some parts of peninsular India.

Slender lorises are nocturnal in their activity pattern. They actively forage and explore during the night and sleep during the day. They are almost completely arboreal and prefer to move on thin branches that can be grasped by the digits of their limbs. Insects like ants, termites, walking sticks, and grasshoppers are eaten most often, though fruits of particular plant species like *Securinega* and *Ziziphus*, and gum from tree species like *Acacia* are also consumed".

Lorises are endangered species in India (Schedule I Wildlife Protection Act 1972). On account of their tendency to move out of protected areas, they are in need of stringent conservation measures by way of habitat improvement and protection. Poaching is a serious threat. Their slow movement, especially when they descend to the ground, makes them victims of road-kills when they encounter vehicular traffic (Mewa Singh pers.comm).

Methods

Since the sighting was by chance, no scientific methodology was followed. The search for the lorises was mostly in the evenings, before dark at the known sites as well as at other likely secluded areas with similar tree clumps. An attempt was also made to search for areas in the trees where the light did not reach through and then determine if it was leaves or fur, or perhaps owls. For majority of the time, bunches of dry leaves misled the attempts. The lorises blended in so well that they were hard to detect until they moved.

No records were made between April and September 2010, partly because of summer vacations from May to July. From July onwards, no lorises were seen, though the known sites were frequently searched; this could also be because the vegetation had grown denser during the rainy season (Chennai experienced heavy rainfall between June and September 2010), making visibility difficult. All the previous sightings made during this study were in the dry season when the leaves on the trees were sparse and there was dried leaf litter on the ground that had been swept into mounds. During the second half of the year, a single individual was recorded on October 05, 2010, and again on November 10, 2010, at 17:00 hrs three lorises, an adult and two darker coloured juveniles were sighted. These were initially sleeping in a group on a tree branch, but later began to move.

We made enquiries with other students, teachers and staff on the campus and were told that some of them had seen small animals that fitted the description of lorises as far back as three years ago. Some students had seen them two years ago as well. They had mostly been spotted on the ground while crossing from tree to tree, or walking slowly along the road. However, apart from noticing the reddish shining eyes

and slow movement, they had attached no importance to the animal and therefore did not report it.

The Habitat

Coastal Chennai south of the Adyar river is characterized by a number of fairly quiet housing colonies with tree-lined avenues linked by crowded commercial roads with shops and restaurants. Several schools and cultural institutions have extensive gardens and good tree cover that provide the greenery that the area is known for. Most of these campuses were built on what was originally sandy land that was planted about fifty years ago with mixed local tree species such as Neem, Ficus varieties, Jamun, *Laburnum* and *Morus* sp. and exotics like Gulmohur, Eucalyptus, Casuarina, Cashew and various ornamental flowering plants. These are interspersed with native *Acacia* and *Prosopis* species.

The present campus is an educational institution with continuous activity and movement of people from early morning till evening. Often there are activities and programmes after dark during which there is vehicular traffic. Paths and roads within the campus are well lit at night. The fauna include over 35 species of birds, several species of snakes, geckos, lizards and amphibians, and an abundance of insects, spiders and other invertebrates like snails and slugs. The other small mammals found on the campus are palm squirrels, mongooses, domestic cats and dogs, shrews, rats and mice.

Previous Records

The last and perhaps the only previous record of the Slender Loris in the general vicinity of Chennai city was sometime around 1970, when it was seen in the campus of the Madras Christian College (MCC), located in the western suburb of Tambaram. At that time Tambaram was outside the city limits and the MCC abutted the Vandalur reserve forest, an extensive scrub jungle that was still relatively undisturbed. Several rare wildlife species were recorded by the zoology department of the college, among which the loris was one (Sanjeeva Raj 1973). Since then, there have been no recorded sightings of this animal in the entire area of greater Chennai. The species has now disappeared from the MCC site as well. At present, the nearest geographical location where a population of over 200 Slender Loris are known to occur is Sriharikota island (Manakadan 2008), which is about 115 km north of Chennai.

While Slender Loris is known to occur in large well-wooded urban campuses in the city of Bengaluru, there are no previous records of the species within an urban environment in Chennai.

Discussion

The occurrence of a shy and highly endangered primate like the Slender Loris in an urban setting comes as a surprise and an exciting discovery, particularly as they are evidently breeding successfully and there is some indication of their presence at this site during the past few years. It is known that lorises do adapt to certain human-dominated landscapes (Honnavalli *et al.* 2009), and they have also been recorded in the city of Bengaluru, where there are over 100 individuals inhabiting its few and fast disappearing green pockets (Gandhi 2008).

However, the history of these animals at this particular site in Chennai is still puzzling. At present we can only speculate about the origins of this group that we have found. They could perhaps have escaped from captivity, or they may be released pets that had managed to survive in the wooded campus surroundings. On the other hand they could be wild lorises that had somehow adventurously migrated from their natural habitat, though it is hard to imagine since there are no natural corridors left in-between the congested urban development. It is also possible that the animals had been there all along, but had not been noticed on account of their reclusive nocturnal habits.

The Guindy National Park which is an extensive forest

in Chennai dating back to colonial times is located less than 6 km from this site. Despite its rich biodiversity, it has no records of the loris and the only primate known to occur there is the Bonnet Macaque *Macaca radiata*. Though Chennai has an active community of birdwatchers and nature photographers, the loris has never been recorded in their urban wildlife checklists.

An extended study is required before any conclusions can be drawn on the status of this species in the city and it is important to conduct detailed surveys of similar green pockets in the immediate vicinity as well. These will provide insights into the occurrence of the Slender Loris in Chennai and will help put conservation action into place.

We hope to continue our investigations to gather more information and intend to maintain careful records of all further sightings of this curious and enigmatic animal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to express our gratitude to Mr. Preston Ahimaz, Prof. Dr. Sanjeeva Raj, Mr. K.V. Sudhakar, Dr. Ravi Chellam, Dr. Ajith Kumar, Prof. Mewa Singh and Mr. Kumaran Sathasivam for generously providing papers, articles and information.

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2. A NOTE ON THE DIET OF TIGER *PANTHERA TIGRIS* LINNAEUS AND Dhole *CUON ALPINUS* PALLAS IN A MONTANE SHOLA FOREST, WESTERN GHATS, INDIA

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Diet studies of large carnivores from the montane shola grasslands are poorly understood. Food habits of large carnivores have been reported from the scrub jungle (Cohen *et al.* 1978; Arivazhagan *et al.* 2007) and deciduous forest (Johnsingh 1983; Karanth and Sunquist 1995; Venkataraman *et al.* 1995; Andheria *et al.* 2007; Ramesh *et al.* 2009) of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, Western Ghats. We present notes on the diet of tiger and dhole from a three-day

survey in Mukurthi National Park in February 2010. The study was conducted in the Mukurthi National Park (>1,800-2,500 m above msl) of the Nilgiris, which comprises of rolling hills and mountains of the evergreen shola grasslands. The sholas are confined to depressions and folds in the mountain characterized by small (7-15 m) and medium (15-20 m) sized trees (Von Lengerke and Blasco 1989). Annual rainfall ranges from 1,500-2,000 mm. Frost is frequent from December to February.